2-3-2011

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DURHAM, N.H. – With a new study out looking at the fate of dispersants used to mitigate the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in summer 2010, concerns have reemerged about the unprecedented use of these chemicals below the surface. Oil spill expert Nancy Kinner, professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of New Hampshire, is available to comment on the study, published recently in the journal Environmental Science and Technology, and on the science of dispersants in general.

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This study found that the concentration of DOSS, a key chemical in the dispersant, decreased as the subsurface plume continues to be moved away from the well by the deepwater currents. This is not surprising, says Kinner, because DOSS is only slowly degraded by microbes and is only present in very low (part per billion to part per trillion) concentrations. A news analysis of the study is available here: http://www.nature.com/news/2011/110127/full/news.2011.54.html#B1.

"This research presents one piece of the puzzle: that the concentration only decreased because of dilution by the surrounding seawater and that DOSS was not degraded," says Kinner. "To determine the full impact of the dispersed oil and the wisdom of the use of dispersants during the spill, we have to look at the range of information in papers being published and consider the risks to natural resources and the response options available to minimize them."

Kinner, who is co-director of the UNH/NOAA Coastal Response Research Center, has particular expertise in the use of dispersants in the response to oil spills. She spoke about the subject before the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling in Washington, D.C., this fall (Sept. 27, 2010).

During the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, Kinner was sought after for her expertise by hundreds of national media outlets; she testified before federal lawmakers three times. In addition, she has taken a leadership role in creating and disseminating scientific knowledge in support of clean-up efforts, convening several high-level meetings among spill responders, scientists, and other stakeholders in the Gulf of Mexico spill region.

The Coastal Response Research Center (CRRC) is focused on developing new approaches to oil spill response and restoration in marine and estuarine environments through research and synthesis of information. Established as a partnership between NOAA and UNH in 2004, it is part of the Environmental Research Group at UNH.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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